Love, Money, Murder, Magic!EDDS gets close and confidential with Shakespeare

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THE EDDS (English Department Drama Society) **Inter Batch Performance Competition**, held on Saturday 18 August 2007 at Natmondol in Dhaka University, kicked off with the pot-bellied Shylock jingling his bags of gold while swaying to the tunes of ABBA's "Money, money, money." This was indeed an unusual way to begin a competition on Shakespeare's plays. Extracts from four plays were staged in the course of the evening, and the performances were judged by the teachers of the Department of English of Dhaka University. The program was undertaken to teach the students decision-making, team-work and organization. Therefore the music, set and light design of the productions were mainly determined by their respective directors, with guidance from Ms. Tahmina Ahmed associate professor of the English Department of Dhaka University and teacher-in-charge of EDDS.

The first performance was from the opening act of *The Merchant of Venice*, which in Shakespeare's original play is set in an open space in the city. However, the director Sabreena Ahmed chose to portray the scene in Shylock's office, with the latter sitting at a desk counting his coins. At this point Bassanio barges in with a proposition that Shylock lend Antonio three-thousand ducats for three months. His entrance is followed by that of Antonio himself, who quarrels with Shylock. We learn that Antonio had called the money-lender a cur and spat on him in public due to his Jewish identity and are reminded of the consequences of religious intolerance. Antonio is more than confident that he will be able to repay the loan on time, and hence agrees to sign the ominous treaty. Suhas Shankar Chowdhury, the actor of Shylock, did an excellent job in bringing out the shrewdness of Shylock's character, who in this scene pretends that the pound-of-flesh condition is no more than a jest. The scene ends appropriately with the sound of winds at sea as Antonio speaks a warning to the audience of events to come.

The second extract to be staged was one of the opening scenes of *As You Like It*, directed by Rajib Bhowmick. It opened with Rosalind grieving her father's banishment, and her cousin Celia trying to cheer her up. Soon the hero Orlando enters the stage, and Rosalind and Orlando immediately fall in love in the approved Shakespearean fashion. Pronabesh Bhowmik was brilliant at acting the part of the lovesick lad. The scene also included an exciting wrestling match between Orlando and Charles. Samiur Rahman Mahid who played the part of Charles won the applause of the audience, despite being an evil character in the play, for comically showing off his muscles on stage. The scene ended with Rosalind and Orlando being separated, with Richard Marx's *Right Here Waiting* playing in the background. Tasin Ashraf, a student of the same 3rd year batch, played an important role in supplying the music for this scene from Shakespeare.

The next performance was from the end of *Othello*, in which the lighting effects were very marked. Soft blue lights were used to create the intimate effect of a bedroom; blended with that were red lights spelling danger. The lights complimented the costumes well as Sudipta Roy, acting as Othello, appeared clad in a red gown proclaiming his intentions to kill his wife for having an affair. The naive-looking Desdemona, played by Sayeda Nure-Royhan, enters the scene and is unable to convince Othello of her innocence. She is strangled but later cleared by Emilia, wife of Iago the culprit of the story. Emilia is then killed by her husband, who manages to escape. Othello, horrified by what he has done, kills himself. This combined team was directed by Rubaid Iftekhar Mahbub.

